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ABSTRACT

A college student of intermediate to advanced English as a second language (ESL) is still constantly trying to identify the rules governing the language and making and correcting mistakes. Sociolinguistic theory can help to understand this type of active, advanced learner and the instructional strategies that complement this learning style. Four models of second language acquisition characterize ESL students and can lead to decisions regarding classroom strategies: the Acculturation Model, Accommodation Theory, the Interlanguage Hypothesis, and the Monitor Model. From these theories, educators can see the significance of underlying psychological factors that influence second language learning. College writing teachers in particular, because of the critical learning stage of their students, must be aware of psychological factors and attempt to identify students' attitudes and motivations. These factors include the social and academic context and self-consciousness about accent. Teaching techniques should reflect a natural, informal environment conducive to interaction. Although contrastive analysis is inappropriate in many cases, it can be used with college ESL writers to understand errors and demonstrate what works and what does not. A rich, supportive linguistic environment is vital to the long-term developmental writing process of ESL students. (MSE)

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Sociolinguistic Theories as Means to Understand and Meet the Needs of ESL College Writers

Current theories on sociolinguistics and second language acquisition identify ESL students as active learners who approach the learning of their target language with cognitive awareness and who, in the process of doing so, parallel the grammatical errors children often make when learning English as their native language. Second language learners of English, submerged in a new language, constantly attempt to identify the rules that govern this language. In this process, they find that new mistakes are made and the learning of the language never seems complete. Thus, an intermediate/advanced ESL college student still requires intensive instruction which may go beyond one term of freshman composition. An examination of sociolinguistic theory can lead to an understanding of this type of active, advanced learner as well as strategies that complement the learner's learning style.

Four models of second language acquisition (Wolfson and Judd) characterize ESL students and can ultimately lead to decisions regarding classroom strategies. The first, the Acculturation Model (Schuman 1978), correlates second language learning with students' psychological and social relationships with the target language. Strong integration with the target language leads to rapid language learning. Thus, it follows logically that the social context of learning is important to ESL students.

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ESL students. Closely related is Accommodation Theory, also based on interaction with the target language. (Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (1977) Related to comfort with the new language, this theory suggests convergence toward the new language when individuals are not threatened by the target language and divergence from it when ill at ease or confused with the whole purpose for studying English. Movement between the primary and secondary languages is elaborated on more with the Interlanguage Hypothesis (Selinker 1972), which serves to map a developmental continuum of interlanguages that can occur as an individual's primary language skills weaken and second language skills grow stronger as a result of formal education as well as submersion and acculturation. Understanding the interlanguage continuum means understanding continued, though varied errors in writing as well as the possibility that an ESL writer can stagnate in the learning process, becoming "fossilized" in a particular developmental stage. This movement from one language to another is most likely achieved through the Monitor Model (Krashen 1978), characterized by conscious and subconscious awareness of language and the desire to internalize it. From these theories, educators can see the significance of underlying psychological factors which influence second language learning.

College writing teachers, in particular, must be aware of psychological factors and must attempt to identify or uncover the attitudes and motivations of the individuals with whom they work. ESL college students are at critical stages. The importance of English is very obvious at this point, often related to long term personal goals and desires. Likewise, many ESL students have studied English a great deal prior to college, and they often

are discouraged with errors that persist. Information along these lines must be gathered, and newly matriculating ESL students should be asked to complete surveys or respond in interviews to offer the following information: previous ESL instruction, previous bilingual instruction, personal attitude concerning movement from primary language, and family attitudes toward individual students' English-only goals. Responses to these should indicate how the student perceives the language and whether he/she receives support in career goals. All of these are important in the learning process. Hesitancy, fear, lack of confidence, as well as isolation from native communities can interfere with the language learning process. All observations, such as concerns with accents or the question of language dominance (which can be tested), should be noted and eventually addressed. Support for the student outside the classroom will often result in productivity in the classroom.

Both the Acculturation and Accommodation Models indicate a correlation between learning a target language and social/academic contexts. Social exchange is fundamental to progress, and ESL students should be engaged in linguistic exchanges with native speakers. For this reason, peer support networks must be established. Each student should have a fellow student assigned to him/her based on similarities and interests, someone who is a native speaker and can orient the student toward the campus itself, activities, and programs as well as aid in acculturation by clarifying language constraints. All too often, when free, ESL students return to the security offered by their primary languages, engaging in conversations with compatriots or family members. Although ties with heritage are important, exposure to English is a must for

the language learning process. Academic goals are also a key to this learning/acquisition process. Advisors and instructors must be supportive so that decisions regarding major areas of study can be made as soon as is possible. Once purpose is established, the study of English becomes significant as a motivator for an end goal. Strong social and academic contexts definitely offer psychological enrichment, a key to learning.

Another emotional factor, which must be mentioned, is a concern many ESL students have but often do not convey. Surveys and interviews identify self-conscious feelings about foreign accents and a general fear about exchanges in English. ESL students are often so overcome with an inferior feeling about their speech that they base decisions on majors on the amount of oral communication required in a certain field. Certainly, this is not a proper criterion in such a significant decision. All research in the area of second language learning cites that fact that learning a new language becomes more difficult with age. Related to this, of course, is the concept of phonology and the varying phonotactic patterns of languages. Sounds are exclusive to certain languages. Thus, ESL students find English sounds foreign, and they have difficulty producing and hearing these sounds. The problem is not only with accent but with the omission of sounds as well. ESL students do not produce, orally or in writing, sounds they do not hear. Writing teachers have to realize that breaking some habitual patterns of errors may require exercises in speaking and listening--not grammar per se. For this reason, ESL students, on college campuses, can be referred to Speech Pathology and Audiology Departments to work on receptive and productive skills. In time,

such work will certainly have its effect on the writing process.

Obviously, the writing class itself will likewise offer general support in this learning process since a classroom, in itself, is a social environment. A rich linguistic exchange can characterize any class, and writing teachers who often feel challenged having native and non-native speakers in a given section must realize the opportunities in this classroom for growth and exchange for each individual present. Teaching techniques, then, should reflect a natural, informal environment that is conducive to interaction, decision-making in the learning process. Such a program, which is process rather than product oriented, is one that benefits all students in the classroom, both native and non-native.

The college writing teacher who works with such diverse groups may find that techniques specifically geared toward ESL instruction can be modified for general classroom use. Such is the case with contrastive analysis. Using it as a method with the general population is certainly inappropriate. Using it as an ESL method is unrealistic, for how often do instructors find themselves in homogeneous groups in which all ESL students speak the same primary language? Contrastive analysis has its significance, though. On some occasions, on a one-to-one basis, teachers find themselves telling an individual that the manner of presentation in his language differs from that of English. More important, ESL teachers must acquaint themselves with and study contrastive analysis, for through it, they can learn why their students make the errors they do. Realizing that subjects are omitted in Spanish because verbs are highly inflected and understanding the Japanese order of subject, object, and then verb as a sentence pattern, teachers can

find reasoning in written passages that are error-filled. Contrastive analysis, likewise, works effectively in the instruction of English in an attempt to build discriminatory skills of all students in class. Most Basic Writing classes must address grammar. Since a majority of people in class show weaknesses in grammar, the lecture approach may not work in building the ability to edit errors out of individual writing. More exchange is needed in class, exchange that would promote the ability to identify correct or incorrect syntax. Using contrastive analysis to demonstrate what works and what does not work would certainly sharpen students' perceptions of grammatical correctness. Thus, classroom methods should involve eliciting information from the class with the hope of eventually eliciting peer or self-evaluation/correction. With this internalization of the language, teachers often find that selective correction of grammar is most effective and that prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing, in that order, permit the student to reconsider all that is written and to seek assistance/evaluation during the process so that motivation can lead to a better grade, better perception, and a better attitude, psychological factors relevant to native and non-native speakers of English. The informal atmosphere of a process-oriented class, with teacher/student exchange and conferencing and peer response certainly complements styles of active learners who know the task that lies ahead of them. An environment which stimulates questions, decisions, and experimentation blends learning and acquisition processes.

The second language learning/acquisition process is characterized by errors, errors which are particularly disheartening to college writers. Such students often blame themselves, feeling inadequate

and unable to learn. Teachers must reassure these students and realize that psychological factors, not only grammar, are instrumental to learning. Most important, composition teachers must realize that errors ESL students produce are with reason and that time, practice, a rich linguistic environment involving speaking, listening, reading, and writing, positive reinforcement, and support are vital in the long-term developmental writing processes of ESL students.

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